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Jasmine A. Huffman

University of New Hampshire

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Research Article

I Cannot Tell a Lie: Emotional Intelligence as a Predictor of Deceptive Behavior

—Jasmine A. Huffman

As a senior psychology student at the University of New Hampshire at Manchester, I serve in many roles. Professionally, I work as the senior career peer in the Career and Professional Success office, as assistant to the lead ambassador in the admissions office, and as a peer assistant leader in the office of Student Development and Involvement. Throughout my experiences, I have developed a keen interest in what allows people to succeed. Whether it be as simple as helping someone find the printer or as complex as helping them find their dream job, each of my positions allows me the opportunity to play a small role in the success stories of my peers.

One of the ways I have promoted the success of my peers is by helping first-year students develop an understanding of emotional intelligence and teaching them ways in which they can improve their own. Emotional intelligence refers to how individuals express, understand, regulate, and use their emotions and those of others (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Petrides & Furnham, 2003). This concept, founded by Dr. Peter Salovey and UNH's very own Dr. John D. Mayer, plays a significant role in the academic and professional success of college students and would become the foundation of my Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF), which I conducted under the guidance of Dr. Nicholas Mian.



The author with Dr. Mian and his daughter in the UNHM Child and Family lab.

As a research assistant in the Child and Family Laboratory, I helped Dr. Mian with two of his studies, engaging with research participants, analyzing data, and training additional research assistants. After I had worked in his lab for over a year and a half, Dr. Mian suggested that I consider conducting a study of my own, not only to improve my knowledge and abilities in the field of research, but also to begin exploring where my interests lie.

The first step in this process was identifying my research topic. I started by making a list of potential ideas, considering everything from how music affects studying to how much students remember from

previous courses. Dr. Mian and I then identified which topics would be feasible and which would be most interesting. I brought up my interest in emotional intelligence, a topic that is becoming widely popular in both higher education and professional environments and has been shown to predict up to 58 percent of career success (Talentsmart, n.d.).

Another topic that I found intriguing was lying, specifically, how acceptable people felt lying was and if this acceptability differed depending on the motivation for the lie. Although emotional intelligence and lying did not fall within Dr. Mian's area of expertise (which is emotional disorders in young children), he felt confident in my research abilities and allowed me to proceed. Over the course of the following semester I conducted an extensive literature review, which I used to help design my study and prepare my SURF proposal. I was ecstatic to be offered the opportunity to spend the summer conducting full-time research on emotional intelligence as a predictor of people's perceptions of lying as well as a predictor of their own deceptive behaviors.

Personality as a Predictor of Deception

Honesty has been identified as one of the most important American values (Graham, Meindl, Koleva, Iyer, & Johnson, 2015). However, research suggests that Americans tell lies nearly every day. One study found that on average, American undergraduate students lied twice a day, with three out of every four of these lies being told for personal gain (DePaulo, Kashy, Kirkendol, Wyer, & Epstein, 1996). Many studies have investigated the ability to recognize a lie, the ability to tell a successful lie, and the individual differences (e.g., age, sex, gender, and education level) associated with these abilities (McLeod & Genereux, 2008).

Studies have also explored personality characteristics and the role they play in predicting deceptive behavior (e.g., Gudjonsson & Sigurdsson, 2004; Weaver, 2005). In a 2008 study, researchers investigated six different personality characteristics and their impact on the perceived acceptability and likelihood of telling different types of lies. The characteristics studied were honesty, kindness, assertiveness, approval motivation, self-monitoring, and Machiavellianism (a personality characteristic describing individuals who freely admit to satisfying their own desires at the expense of others; McLeod & Genereux, 2008). The lies investigated were separated into four categories, each reflecting a different motivation: altruistic, conflict avoidance, social acceptance, and self-gain. Altruistic lies benefit or protect someone else, resulting in some cost to the liar. Social-acceptance lies benefit the liar so that he or she may fit in or be liked by others. Conflict-avoidance lies benefit the liar by helping them avoid conflict. Self-gain lies benefit the liar at some cost to the lie recipient.

The results of McLeod and Genereux's 2008 study identified motivation behind a lie to be a significant predictor of perceived acceptability and likelihood of lying, which was consistent with previous studies (e.g., Backbier, Hoogstraten, & Terwogt-Kouwenhoven, 1997; Boon & McLeod, 2001; Lindskold & Walters, 1983). However, the results of the 2008 study were unique in that specific sets of personality characteristics were found to significantly predict perceived acceptability and likelihood of lying for each type of lie. For example, participants who did not value honesty and kindness and who were rated high in Machiavellianism had a tendency to see self-gain lies as extremely acceptable and were significantly more likely to tell them. In addition, participants rated high in assertiveness and honesty were significantly less likely to tell altruistic lies.

One significant limitation of the 2008 study is that it focused on individuals' experiences of their own emotions and neglected to consider how well those individuals recognized and processed the emotions of others. My study aimed to expand upon McLeod and Genereux's 2008 research by examining the relationship between emotional intelligence and perceived acceptability and likelihood of telling specifically intentioned lies. Characteristics of individuals with high levels of emotional intelligence include the ability to identify the emotions of themselves and others, to understand their causes and consequences, and to use this information to express or regulate their own emotions in a socially acceptable manner to enhance thoughts and actions (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). As such, a growing number of colleges and universities are educating students about this concept, and businesses are emphasizing assessment of emotional intelligence in hiring and promotion practices.

Some of the most popular assessment models of emotional intelligence used in higher education and professional environments are the Trait Emotional Intelligence model (Petrides, Pita, & Kokkinaki, 2007) and the EQ-i 2.0 ("MHT Assessments," n.d.). These models incorporate the personality characteristics shown to influence perceived acceptability and likelihood of lying, but also include novel factors, such as emotional awareness and understanding. These models use self-report assessments, which evaluate an individual's answers to a variety of questions about themselves to measure their emotional intelligence.

The central hypotheses of my study were that (1) perceived acceptability and likelihood of lying would be predicted by emotional intelligence, but would vary depending on the type of lie, and (2) the relationship between the type of lie and perceived acceptability and likelihood of lying would be affected by emotional intelligence. More specifically, individuals with lower levels of emotional intelligence would perceive all types of lies as equally acceptable and would be equally likely to tell them themselves, whereas individuals with higher levels of emotional intelligence would discern between different types of lies and be more likely to tell only those lies they view as acceptable.

Assessing Emotional Intelligence and Deception

To test my hypotheses, I developed an online survey consisting of five different measures. I used two separate prevalidated instruments to evaluate emotional intelligence: the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire–Short Form (TEIQue-SF; Petrides, 2009) and the Profile of Emotional Competence (PEC; Brasseur, Grégoire, Bourdu & Mikolajczak, 2013). The TEIQue–SF is a self-report, 30-item assessment that asks participants to indicate how much they agree with each statement. Examples of statements are "I usually find it difficult to regulate my emotions" and "I tend to 'back down' even if I know I am right."

The PEC is a self-report assessment comprising 50 items. This measure asks participants to indicate the degree to which a statement describes them or how often they respond to a situation in the way described. Two examples are "As my emotions arise I don't understand where they come from" and "I often take the wrong attitude to people because I was not aware of their emotional state."

To assess perceived acceptability and likelihood of lying, I was granted permission to use the complete assessment used in McLeod and Genereux's 2008 study. This assessment asks participants to rate 16 deception scenarios on (1) how acceptable they feel a lie is and (2) the degree to which

they would tell the lie themselves. Each scenario clearly describes one person lying to another for one of the following reasons: altruism, conflict avoidance, social acceptance, or self-gain.

I also evaluated stress as a confounding variable. Previous studies have demonstrated a significant negative correlation between emotional intelligence and stress, suggesting that individuals with higher levels of emotional intelligence are more adept at coping with stress (Puri, Kaur, & Yadav, 2016), which many undergraduate students experience (American Institute of Stress, n.d.). The Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) is a self-report measure that asks participants to identify the degree to which each of 42 statements has applied to them over the past week. Examples of these statements are “I felt scared without any good reason” and “I had difficulty in swallowing.”

Originally I planned to include only the four measures discussed above, but my mentor suggested that I reach out to Dr. John D. Mayer, a UNH professor and expert in the field of emotional intelligence, and ask him to consult on my study. Dr. Mayer informed me that there is some debate among psychologists about the validity of self-report emotional intelligence measures, mainly because of social desirability bias, “the tendency for people to present a favorable image of themselves on questionnaires” (Van de Mortel, 2008, p. 40). Additionally, he provided me with materials describing some of his current research and suggested that I include the Test of Personal Intelligence MINI-12, a brief version of the full-length ability-based measure, to evaluate personal intelligence in my study.

Personal intelligence, although closely related to emotional intelligence, takes into account all elements of the personality system, including things such as an individual’s motives, previous knowledge, and attitudes, which emotional intelligence does not (Mayer, 2014). With this new knowledge about personal intelligence and ability-based assessments, I decided to verify the validity of my collected emotional intelligence scores with the Test of Personal Intelligence MINI-12 (Mayer, Panter, & Caruso, 2018). I hypothesized that those with higher levels of emotional intelligence would also have higher levels of personal intelligence.

This test is a 12-item ability-based test, with correct and incorrect answers. Ability-based tests are thought to present a more accurate depiction of an individual’s abilities and actions than a self-report measure in which the participant rates their abilities on a scale. Each item on the Test of Personal Intelligence MINI-12 describes an individual in a particular situation and asks participants to indicate which thought processes would produce the most beneficial outcome, or which conclusion is most appropriate given the information provided.

After I received institutional review board approval for my study, I began the process of distributing my survey. The instructors of UNH summer undergraduate psychology courses (held on both the UNH Manchester and UNH Durham campuses) kindly agreed to send an email to their students inviting them to participate in this study. We compensated the first 60 students to complete the online survey with a \$10.00 Amazon gift card. Once I collected all the data, I shut down the survey and began my analysis.

Analyzing Emotional Intelligence, Deception, and Now Personal Intelligence

I analyzed data using IBM SPSS (the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), a software program that allows for the analysis of quantitative data. I tested simple relationships using ANOVA (analysis of variance), which analyzes the differences between the mean of each group on an outcome variable. I used Pearson correlations to assess the relationship between (1) perceived acceptability and likelihood of telling each type of lie and (2) an individual's levels of emotional and personal intelligence. I also used Pearson correlations to assess the effect of depression, anxiety, and stress on the emotional intelligence measures, but found no significant effects.

Although the results of this initial study suggested that emotional intelligence and personal intelligence could be related to the likelihood of lying and perceived acceptability for each type of lie, these results did not reach statistical significance. I identified strong effects, but the small sample size meant I had low statistical power (the ability to detect significant relationships). With the hopes of strengthening the statistical power of my study, I sought out and obtained additional funding from the Manchester Undergraduate Project Support fund, which allowed me to recruit 20 more participants during the spring 2019 semester, thus increasing my sample size to 80.

The analysis of the data collected from the total sample ($n = 80$) did reveal statistically significant results. Overall, likelihood of lying scores showed a stronger relationship with emotional and personal intelligence scores than perceived acceptability of lying scores did. Perceived acceptability and likelihood of lying varied for each type of lie, with significant differences found between social-acceptance lies and self-gain lies (Figure 1).

Although scores on the Profile of Emotional Competence did not result in any significant correlations, the scores on the self-report Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire–Short Form did. However, in comparison to both assessments of emotional intelligence, ability-based assessment of personal intelligence resulted in stronger relationships with both the likelihood of lying and perceived acceptability.

The significant correlations between likelihood of lying and the Test of Personal Intelligence MINI-12 varied for each type of lie (Figure 2). The strongest correlations occurred between self-reported likelihood of telling social-acceptance lies and levels of personal intelligence. This indicates that those with higher personal intelligence are less likely to tell social-acceptance lies. This correlation differed

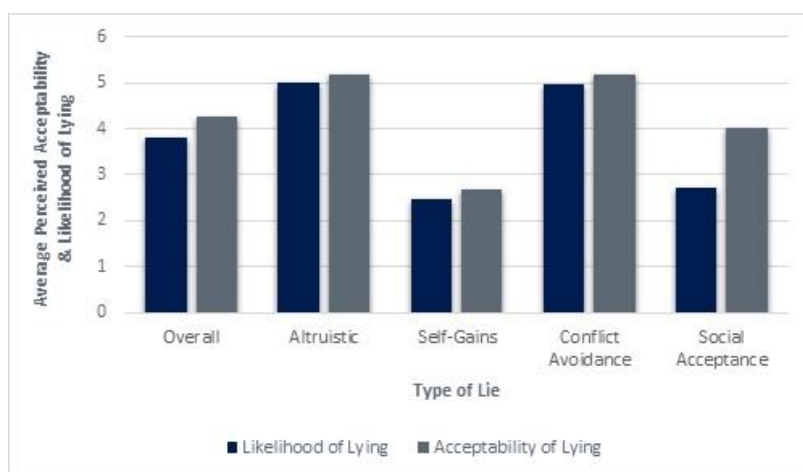


Figure 1: Summary of the differences between the mean perceived acceptability and likelihood of lying for overall lies as well as for each category of specific lies: altruistic, self-gain, conflict avoidance, and social acceptance.

significantly from the correlations between personal intelligence and self-reported likelihood of telling other types of lies, evidencing high discernibility for those with high personal intelligence.

The relationship between scores on the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire–Short Form and likelihood of lying also varied for each type of lie (Figure 2). These scores resulted in significant correlations between likelihood of lying overall as well as likelihood of telling social-acceptance lies specifically. None of the other types of lies resulted in significant correlations with the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire–Short Form.

| Measure | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|
| 1. Lying Likelihood: Overall | - | .71** | .61** | .83** | .79** | -.27* | -.30* |
| 2. Lying Likelihood: Altruistic | | - | .22 | .48** | .42** | -.15 | -.07 |
| 3. Lying Likelihood: Self Gains | | | - | .37** | .26* | -.21 | -.33** |
| 4. Lying Likelihood: Conflict Avoidance | | | | - | .55** | -.14 | -.002 |
| 5. Lying Likelihood: Social Acceptance | | | | | - | -.29* | -.46** |
| 6. TEIQ | | | | | | - | .17 |
| 7. TOPI | | | | | | | - |

Figure 2: Summary of intercorrelations for likelihood of lying scores for overall, altruistic, self-gain, conflict avoidance, and social acceptance lies; Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire–Short Form (TEIQ); and Test of Personal Intelligence (TOPI). The numbers listed under *Measure* correspond with the numbers along the top of the figure. The asterisk indicates that the result is not caused by chance; specifically, "*" means that there is a 95% probability that this result is not attributable to chance ($p < 0.05$), and "**" indicates a 99% probability that this result is not attributable to chance ($p < 0.01$).

This pattern of results suggests that scores on ability-based tests of personal intelligence, such as the Test of Personal Intelligence MINI-12, may be useful in predicting an individual's likelihood of telling lies for the purpose of social acceptance (as opposed to lying in general). Although not originally planned for use in my experiment, the Test of Personal Intelligence ended up being a significantly better predictor of likelihood of lying than self-reported emotional intelligence. This may mean that ability-based assessments are superior to self-report measures. This makes intuitive sense, because a self-report test of emotional intelligence includes answers that are clearly more socially acceptable, so those who are more likely to tell a social-acceptance lie may also be more likely to provide a biased response on the assessment.

Importance to the Discipline and to the Author

Although emotional intelligence, personal intelligence, and lying have been studied in a variety of the social sciences, no known studies have investigated their relationships until now. My study has begun to address this gap in the research, which could have long-term implications on student development, professional hiring practices, management techniques, and more. One day personal and emotional intelligence assessments could give educators and employers an understanding of how likely an individual is to lie under different circumstances. This could prove helpful in evaluating one's "fit" with a particular position or task.

Throughout my experience as a psychology student, research assistant, and now primary investigator, I have come to appreciate the importance and complexity of psychological research. This appreciation and my innate desire to learn have inspired me to work in the field after graduating from UNHM and to pursue a position in a psychology graduate program. My undergraduate research gave me the opportunity to further my understanding of emotional intelligence, personal intelligence, deceptive behavior, anxiety, stress, and depression, allowing me to hone in on the areas of research I may be interested in pursuing throughout my graduate education. Eventually I hope to earn a PhD in psychology, which will allow me to progress toward a meaningful career as a professor, where I will be able to continue to conduct research and teach psychology courses.

I would like to extend a huge thank-you to Mr. Peter Akerman and the Hamel Center for Undergraduate Research for their support, and to Mr. Dana Hamel for providing the funding for my Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship. I would also like to thank the Manchester Undergraduate Project Support Fund for giving me the resources needed to increase my sample size. I would like to thank Dr. Nicholas Mian for being such an incredible mentor throughout not only this project but also the entirety of my undergraduate studies. I never planned to study psychology, but thanks to him, his passion for teaching, and his unconditional support and encouragement, this field of study became my passion. In that regard, I would also like to thank the other psychology faculty members at the University of New Hampshire at Manchester, Dr. Daniel Seichepine, Dr. John Sparrow, and Dr. Allison Paglia, for providing an environment where I was able to explore my passion. Thank you to Dr. John D. Mayer, who provided guidance and materials that were pivotal to the success of this project. And thank you to the UNHM staff for all of your support and encouragement. Last, I would like to thank all of my friends and family for their support, with a special thank-you to Allison Dyke, for helping me figure out where all of my sentences were going along the way.

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Author and Mentor Bios

Jasmine Huffman is from Concord, New Hampshire. She will graduate from the University of New Hampshire at Manchester in May 2019 with a bachelor of arts degree in psychology and a minor in American Sign Language and deaf studies. Jasmine began her research experience working as a research assistant for Dr. Mian in UNHM’s Child and Family Lab. After a year and a half, Dr. Mian suggested that Jasmine conduct a study of her own through a Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF). Jasmine says that she gained an incredible amount by taking a research project from design through to presentation: a deepened understanding of emotional and personal intelligence; the complexities of self-report and ability-based assessments; how to maintain the integrity of research; and the ins and outs of the institutional review board process for approving research involving human subjects. Jasmine feels her SURF experience not only built her research skills but also helped her identify possible areas of study in the PhD program she plans to pursue.

Nicholas Mian, assistant professor of psychology at the University of New Hampshire at Manchester since 2015, specializes in clinical psychology and anxiety disorders in young children. Jasmine’s research focus on emotional and personal intelligence and the likelihood of lying was outside of Dr. Mian’s specific expertise in child anxiety, but he felt confident in her ability to take the lead. As a mentor, Dr. Mian emphasizes the importance of study design and statistical analysis, and he notes, “It was very exciting to see Jasmine gradually develop her research questions and then collaborate on the study design to help answer them.” Through this mentorship, Dr. Mian learned a lot about the constructs of lying and about various intelligences, as well as how to encourage students to follow their interests. Jasmine is one of Dr. Mian’s first two mentees to publish in *Inquiry*—both in the 2019 issue.

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